

## Newspooks

## PRESS CLIPS

By Alexander Cockburn

It seems to me, looking back on the article with the sinewy hindsight of a couple of weeks, that Carl Bernstein got a somewhat less positive reaction than he deserved to his *Rolling Stone* article on the CIA and the media.

"So what else is new?" said his professional colleagues and competitors, leafing through the paragraphs about *The New York Times*, *Time*, CBS, Joe Alsop, and the others. Both in print and informally, the response was less than ecstatic. Where were the names? Bernstein mentioned a figure of 400 journalists in some sort of a relationship with the agency. But who, when, how? Bernstein's old paper, *The Washington Post*, produced a stentorian and interminable effort by Richard Harwood and Walter Pincus, largely devoted to an attempt to demolish Bernstein and concluding with the gloomy bleat that "little is known as fact, much is suspected."

Actually, as Bernstein remarked in the course of an interview with Philip Nobile for Universal Press Syndicate, "the real point is not to come up with a particular number, but to show the pervasive nature of the CIA's access to the media during the 1950s, '60s, and even into the early '70s. That's what's news about this story."

But in reading his report journalists got so caught up in looking for particular trees that they missed the truly amazing extent of the forest. Not that Bernstein was not very specific on occasion, establishing—in my view—beyond all credible doubt and despite passionate denials by principals involved—that Luce's *Time*, Paley's CBS and Sulzberger's *New York Times*, along with other publications and broadcasting companies, had cooperated willingly with the CIA. "You don't need to manipulate *Time* magazine," a Senate investigator remarked, "because there are agency people at the management level."

Even so, it's the scale of the enterprise that should be noted. Bernstein quotes a member of Frank Church's Senate committee as saying, "From the CIA point of view this was the highest, most sensitive covert program of all . . . It was all a much larger part of the operational system than has been indicated." For the better part of three decades, that is, usage of the U.S. communications industry was a major and successful preoccupation of the CIA. Even now, under the CIA's new policy, the agency says it will not enter into any paid or contractual relationship with correspondents and that it will welcome unpaid, voluntary cooperation. And as a CIA official told Bernstein: "One journalist is worth 20 agents." As the old rhyme went: "You cannot hope to bribe or twist, thank God, the British journalist. But seeing what the man will do/unpaid, there's no occasion to."

What I suspect makes Bernstein's colleagues uncomfortable is the net conclusion of his article, that for the three decades, and very probably even now, the agency and the established media saw comfortably eye to eye on American policies and found no ethical or political problem in working in cahoots with each other on an extensive scale. The CIA has received its measure of just abuse for what happened in the three decades, while the press—always shrilly asking for numbers and details—has gotten off more or less scot free. *Quis custodiet*, and all that.

## In Town This Week

Fully decked out with an Australian passport, the famous socialist journalist Wilfred Burchett is just starting a two-month speaking tour 'round the country, sponsored by *The Guardian* (for which Burchett has been a correspondent for 22 years) and the Wilfred Burchett Support Committee. Access to the United States has not always been this simple for Burchett, whose passport was revoked back in the 1950s. For years he travelled on papers furnished by the North Vietnamese. Castro gave him Cuban papers in 1971 and Labour prime minister Gough Whitlam restored his Australian passport in 1972.

When Burchett was last here in 1971 to cover the UN, he was armed with Cuban credentials which did not allow him to travel more than 25 miles from Columbus Circle. Nonetheless, he soon got a call from an emissary of Henry Kissinger. Arrangements were made to transport Burchett to the White House, where Kissinger cross-examined him about the leaders of both North Vietnam and the NLF, presumably as background for the secret negotiations which culminated in the open negotiations in 1972. This was not the first time that Burchett played a part in U.S. diplomacy. In 1968 he met with Averell Harriman in Paris to discuss Burchett's role as an intermediary in attempting to halt the bombing of North Vietnam. Subsequently, it seems, Harriman thanked Burchett for his role in securing the release of the first three American POWs.

Burchett, who was the only western correspondent permitted to report from Saigon after the provisional government took over in April 1975, will be talking about Vietnam, Angola, and China. For \$2.50 you can hear him next Friday, October 21, at Washington Irving High School at 16th Street and Irving Place, at 7:30 p.m. Dinh Ba Thi, UN Ambassador for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam will be in attendance. C'mon fellows, wouldn't you rather listen to Burchett than read C. L. Sulzberger, who, I'm glad to see, is briefly back in harness at *The New York Times*, as though no allegations about the CIA and E. Howard Hunt had even been made.